

THE GENUS *PROABLEPHARUS* (SCINCIDAE, LACERTILIA) IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

G.M. STORR*

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ABSTRACT

Two species, *P. tenuis* (Broom) (synonyms *broomensis* and *davisi*) and *P. reginae* are revised.

INTRODUCTION

Until recently all the Old World skinks with lower eyelid immovable and transparent had been brought together in a single genus *Ablepharus*. Fuhn (1969) has shown that such a genus was grossly polyphyletic. He divided the Australian ablepharic skinks into nine groups, one of which is the present genus.

At first sight the head scutellation of *P. tenuis* looks quite unlike that of *P. reginae*, but the differences are in fact quite trivial. It seems that the shield in *P. tenuis* corresponding to the first supraocular of *P. reginae* has fused with the first two supraciliaries.

All the specimens used in this revision are lodged in the Western Australian Museum, except for one (number prefixed with JSE) collected by the British Joint Services Expedition to Central Australia.

Proablepharus

Proablepharus Fuhn, 1969: 73. Type species: *Ablepharus tenuis* Broom and *A. reginae* Glauert.

Diagnosis

Very small, pentadactyl skinks with eye covered by spectacle and with interparietal free.

Description

Snout low and narrow. Body slender. Tail somewhat thick basally. Limbs short, usually failing to meet when adpressed. Ear aperture very small, without lobules.

*Curator of Birds and Reptiles, W.A. Museum

Nasals very widely separated. No supranasal or postnasal. Prefrontals very large but nearly always separated. Frontoparietals paired or wholly or partially fused. Loreals two, in horizontal series. Spectacle surrounded by granules which are hidden by brow in *tenuis* and in most mainland *reginae*. Upper temporal much larger than two subequal lower temporals. Upper labials normally 7; third-last subocular, very low and wide. Usually a pair of large oblique nuchals, sometimes separated in *reginae*. Supradigital scales in one series. Subdigital lamellae entire, smooth.

Dorsally and laterally olive, practically without pattern.

Distribution

Arid and northern semiarid and subhumid zones of Australia where ground cover dominated by spinifex (*Triodia* and *Plectrachne* spp.).

Proablepharus tenuis

Ablepharus tenuis Broom, 1896, Ann. Mag. Nat. Hist. (6) 18: 342. Muldiva, North Queensland (R. Broom).

Ablepharus broomensis Lönnberg & Andersson, 1913, K. svenska Vetensk. Akad. Handl. 52 (3): 11. Broome, Western Australia (E.G. Mjöberg).

Ablepharus davisii Copland, 1952, Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S. Wales 77: 121. Harding Range [16°18'S, 124°50'E], Western Australia (C. Davis).

Diagnosis

Supraoculars 3, only first in contact with frontal; supraciliaries 3 or 4, first much the largest.

Distribution

Far north of Western Australia, south to Broome and Lake Argyle. Extralimital in far north of Northern Territory and northern Queensland.

Description

Snout-vent length (mm): 24-32 (N 18, mean 28.3). Length of tail (% SVL): 126-150 (N 6, mean 140).

Prefrontals separated (usually very narrowly). Frontoparietals fused in 12 specimens, partly fused in 5 specimens (suture extending from rear for one-fifth to one-third of way to frontal), paired in one specimen. Supraciliaries normally 3; 4 in some specimens, where uppermost postocular could be construed as a supraciliary. Upper labials 7 except in one specimen with 8. Mid-body scale rows 22-26 (mostly 24, N 17, mean 24.0). Lamellae under fourth toe 17-22 (N 14, mean 18.8).

Back olive grey, olive green or olive brown, most scales with an anterior black or dark brown spot of variable size and shape. Head pale brown, finely flecked with blackish. Under surface whitish, except for dark grey under tail and brown under digits.



Map of Western Australia showing location of specimens of *Proablepharus tenuis* (including types of *broomensis* and *davisi*) and *P. reginae*.

Material

Kimberley Division: Crystal Creek, Admiralty Gulf (43045-6, 43102-7); Prince Regent River Reserve (46877); Lake Argyle (47315-24).

Proablepharus reginae

Ablepharus reginae Glauert, 1960, W. Aust. Nat. 7: 119. Queen Victoria Spring, Western Australia (W.H. Butler).

Diagnosis

Supraoculars 4, first two in contact with frontal; supraciliaries 4-7, all small.

Distribution

Arid zone of Western Australia between lats. 18° and 30°S, including Barrow Island. Extralimital in southwest of Northern Territory.

Description

Snout-vent length (mm): 21-41 (N 35, mean 32.2). Length of tail (% SVL): 129-224 (N 13, mean 165).

Prefrontals narrowly separated, except in one specimen where they just touch. Frontoparietals paired. Supraciliaries normally 5;4 in some specimens if last construed as a postocular; one specimen with 6 and 7. Upper labials 7 except in two specimens with 8. Midbody scale rows 24-28 (N 34, mean 26.4). Lamellae under fourth toe 21-26 (N 35, mean 23.3).

Back olive brown, most scales with an anterior black spot that tends in some specimens (especially from Barrow Island) to spread over much or whole of scale. Central and posterior head shields dark brown (black in most Barrow Island specimens). Snout and tail pale brown. Under surface whitish, except for dark brown under digits.

Geographic variation

Barrow Island specimens differ from mainland specimens in being smaller (mean SVL 30.3 *vs* 33.2) and darker and in having more subdigital lamellae (mean 23.6 *vs* 22.8). In most island specimens the upper periocular granules are not hidden by brow, whereas in most mainland specimens they are hidden.

Material

Kimberley Division: 45 km SE of Halls Creek (23063-6); 13 km E of Margaret River HS (46114); Louisa Downs (46062); 18 km E of Christmas Creek HS (46109).

North-west Division: 40 km E of Port Hedland (46504); Woodstock (27993); Barrow Island (28001-2, 29035-9, 47299-314).

Eastern Division: 32 km S of Neale Junction (34516); Queen Victoria Spring (13300 holotype, 18513).

Northern Territory: Kintore Range, 23°21'S, 129°23'E (JSE 247).

REFERENCE

- FUHN, I.E. (1969). The 'polyphyletic' origin of the genus *Ablepharus* (Reptilia, Scincidae): a case of parallel evolution. *Ztschr. zool. Syst. & Evol'forsch.* 7: 67-76.